

Polis – General distrust

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Martin Bell's party to launch his new book [The Truth That Sticks](#) tonight was very much a gathering of the renegades. Bell himself is a famous campaigner against official hypocrisy and mendacity. Labour refusnik Clare Short was there with Tory dissenter Richard Shephard. Another man who has made waves this week with his attacks on US policy in Iraq is [Sir Michael Jackson](#) the crumpled-faced general who led the operation in Kosovo and who launches his own book tomorrow. Jackson is a hero of Martin Bell's, but the General is also described in glowing terms by the man Bell blames for poisoning the political well, Alastair Campbell. In his [diaries](#) he speaks of how impressive Jackson was as a personality and as a military/political figure. Over the white wine and canapes at Foyles Jackson launched a blistering attack on the media and the *Evening Standard* in particular for its coverage of the British 'withdrawal' from Basra. He told me he was livid with the description of it as the British Army's first 'defeat' in 20 years. The BBC's legendary foreign correspondent Kate Adie joined the conversation to tell Jackson not to worry as it wasn't an attack on the army so much as an attempt to keep assaulting the Labour government over its ill-fated support for George W Bush in Iraq.

I think Adie is right to insist that respect for British servicemen is still high. But it is interesting how with this case and with the capture of the British sailors by Iran that the media appears less deferential in its treatment of the military. Our armed forces have to carry out the policies the politicians decide upon, but that doesn't stop them becoming political footballs.

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